



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JURY CONVICTS FELON OF FIREARMS; 15-YEAR MINIMUM SENTENCE

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that a convicted felon was found guilty by a jury in federal court today for illegally possessing several stolen firearms.

Robert Joseph Harper, 27, who currently is in state custody, was found guilty by a federal trial jury of being a felon in possession of eight stolen firearms.

Following the presentation of evidence in **Harper's** trial, Graves said, the jury in U.S. District Court in Springfield deliberated for about 50 minutes before returning the guilty verdict to U.S. Chief District Judge Dean Whipple this morning, ending a trial that began on June 27, 2005.

Harper was convicted of being a felon in possession of eight firearms on April 16, 2004, in Laclede County, Mo. The firearms included a Bryco Arms 9 mm handgun, two Remington 243 rifles, a Remington 742 rifle, a J.C. Higgins .22-caliber rifle, a Remington .22-caliber rifle, a Browning 12-gauge shotgun and a Remington 700 rifle. Under federal statutes, Graves explained, it is illegal for any felon to be in possession of any firearm or ammunition. **Harper** has seven 1995 criminal felony convictions for stealing, burglary and escape.

Harper also was convicted of illegally possessing stolen firearms on April 16, 2004. The jury found that **Harper** possessed the firearms in connection with a burglary, tampering, stealing and resisting arrest, Graves said.

Harper was originally charged in an indictment returned by a federal grand jury on July 23, 2004, in Springfield. He was originally arrested for illegally possessing the firearms after law enforcement stopped him driving a stolen 2003 Chevrolet Trailblazer in Laclede County. As a law enforcement officer approached the vehicle it sped away and a pursuit ensued, Graves said.

The pursuit resulted in the Trailblazer crashing. Harper was then identified as the driver of the vehicle. The firearms were subsequently recovered from the vehicle during a search.

Under federal statutes, **Harper** may be subject to a mandatory minimum of 15 years in federal prison without parole, up to life in federal prison without parole, plus a fine up to \$250,000.

This case is being prosecuted by Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael O. Hendrickson. The case was investigated by the Missouri State Highway Patrol, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Laclede County, Mo., Sheriff's Department, the Pulaski County, Mo., Sheriff's Department, the Phelps County, Mo., Sheriff's Department, the Camden County, Mo., Sheriff's Department, the Lebanon, Mo., Police Department and the Springfield, Mo., Police Department.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at
www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow